

Outstanding Woman in Business

In this section of "Inspirers" we catalogue outstanding women leaders in our corporate world who broke into, what was mainly men's domain, and established themselves as "women entrepreneurs" of merit, vision,

courage, and reliability. Through their exceptional work they were able to change the perception of women and their image and gradually establish their credentials in the business world.

Along with men, *The Daily Star*, in partnership with DHL, have also been honouring these women leaders through our Business Award as "Outstanding Woman in Business" since 2000. Here we present them

together – in reverse order – with the hope that this special supplement will encourage more women to enter the world of business and break the "glass ceiling" that has held back our women over the years.

RUPALI CHOWDHURY – 2020



Managing Director
of Berger Paints
Bangladesh

If women want their voices to be heard and supersede all the impediments that come their way, they have to be confident enough to express themselves articulately.

Confidence grows only in those who continuously learn new skills, sharpen their existing ones, and stay well-aware of the innovations and changes that are happening not only within the country but also across the globe.

Now, anything a woman aspires to learn is available at her fingertips. Alongside reading materials on management and other relevant subjects, browsing online articles, blogs, and social media content are indispensable tools for a woman to stay ahead of the competition.

This is what Rupali Chowdhury, managing director of Berger Paints Bangladesh, believes a woman needs to become successful.

She credited her successful career to the strong foundation she built during her childhood.

"I was raised in a small town in Chattogram called Patiya. In the post-liberation period, a renaissance was going on in Bangladesh, and I also felt its effect," she said.

Chowdhury focused on extra-curricular activities while growing up.

"That period of my life taught me how to break the shackles and prejudices. My extremely supportive mother, Shalinata Chowdhury, also encouraged me to explore my true potential."

Rupali Chowdhury strongly believes people who remain engrossed with cultural and other extra-curricular activities in their childhood eventually excel in life.

"At our home, we had access to an eclectic collection of books. We actually inherited the habit of reading different types of books from our father, the late Priyadarshan Chowdhury, who was a doctor by profession, was an avid reader and subscribed to foreign magazines, including *Newsweek*, *Times*, *Readers' Digest* and *Desh*."

"The cultural activities I was involved in helped me know new people, constantly grow, become compassionate, and hone my interpersonal skills."

After completing honours in chemistry from Chattogram University, Chowdhury did her MBA from the Institute of Business Administration under Dhaka University.

"My brother Shyamal Bikash Chowdhury and my husband Abdul Haque inspired me to complete the MBA programme. I believe that was a turning point in my career. That MBA programme really helped me learn how to be successful in the business world."

She started her career with a Swiss multinational pharmaceutical and chemical

company called Ciba Geigy (Bangladesh) in 1984. She moved to the port city after marriage and joined Berger Paints in 1990 as a planning manager.

She worked in various departments of the multinational company, including marketing, sales, distribution, planning and systems in different supervisory capacities, which made her one of the finest leaders not only in the paint industry but also all other sectors in the country.

Berger reached several milestones under her leadership, including the formation of two international joint ventures – Berger Becker Bangladesh in 2012 and Berger Fosroc in 2018.

The entry to the corporate world was not smooth, she said.

"Once you start working, people will only see how well you can deal with critical situations. Gender doesn't get that much focus then."

She became the director for operations of Berger Paints in 2004 and managing director in 2008.

Chowdhury served the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry as president for two terms (2013-2015 and 2015-2017) and was elected again for the 2019-21 term.

Berger reached several milestones under her leadership, including the formation of two international joint ventures – Berger Becker Bangladesh in 2012 and Berger Fosroc in 2018.

During her tenure, Berger has diversified to a number of business segments, including adhesives, textile emulsions, and printing ink, brought new technologies to the industry and launched environment-friendly, lead-free, and odourless paints.

She considers people management skills along with functional expertise as the fundamentals of her leadership strengths.

"I wanted to lead Berger by building an organisational structure based on meritocracy."

Chowdhury said her parents, siblings, husband, and in-laws had played a vital role in her path to glory.

"Credit also goes to my colleagues and stakeholders in the companies for their splendid support. I want to express my gratitude to our former managing director Masih-Ul-Karim and our former regional director KR Das."

She said she is also indebted to the company's board of directors and majority shareholders, who gave her the opportunity to work in different capacities.

"I prefer women to be self-dependent first before getting married," said Chowdhury, also the chairman and managing director of Jenson & Nicholson (Bangladesh), a subsidiary of Berger Paints Bangladesh.

What surprises Chowdhury the most is the absence of women in the top positions in the financial sector.

Many women are now working in the top posts in multinational companies, but heartbreakingly, many of them might have to give up the job for family reasons just before taking the leadership roles, she said.

For a successful company, the leaders should believe in putting the right person

in the right place, said the philanthropist, who is also an independent director of Bata Shoe Company (Bangladesh) and Linde Bangladesh.

The seasoned corporate leader said she now wants to give back to society by working with the regulatory bodies and global entities to increase foreign investment in Bangladesh.

As the number one company in the paint industry, Berger Paints Bangladesh has been consistently trying to diversify its product range, she said.

2020 had been a tough period for Berger Paints Bangladesh due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

The deadly coronavirus slashed the company's sales by almost 50 percent in the April-June quarter to Tk 228.5 crore from the previous quarter.

Chowdhury emerged as a great leader and led the company to provide its painters with over Tk 1.75 crore to help them recover fast from the fallout of the pandemic.

She also made it possible for Berger Paints Bangladesh to achieve 81 percent of last year's sales in the April-September period of 2020.

Chowdhury thanked The Daily Star and DHL Express Bangladesh for selecting her for the Outstanding Woman in Business award.

"Any recognition is a matter of great joy. I am delighted to receive the award. I believe that the award will encourage other women to do better in life," she said.

"But I don't consider myself as a finished product. I consider myself a work in progress. This award is going to inspire me to move further beyond, inspire Bangladeshi people and create jobs."

Having back and knee pain frequently?

Vitamin D deficiency^{1,2,3}
is known to cause muscle
weakness and pain

+ CALCIUM

+ VITAMIN D

Horlicks Women's PLUS
gives you **100%** daily requirement
of Calcium and Vitamin D*
It has no added sugar*

**Horlicks
Women's
PLUS**



¹Heidari B, Javadian Y, Babael M, Yousef-Ghahari B. Restorative Effect of Vitamin D Deficiency on Knee Pain and Quadriceps Muscle Strength in Knee Osteoarthritis. *Acta Med Iran*. 2015 Aug;53(8):466-70.
²Cai C. Treating Vitamin D Deficiency and Insufficiency in Chronic Neck and Back Pain and Muscle Spasm: A Case Series. *Perm J*. 2019;23:18-241.
³Mascarenhas R, Mobarhan S. Hypovitaminosis D-induced pain. *Nutr Rev*. 2004 Sep;62(9):354-9.
*In 2 serves (60 g) as per ICMR 2010 Guidelines on Women. Horlicks Women's Plus is a nourishing beverage to be taken as a part of a regular diet.*It contains natural sugar.